

San Esteban del Rey Mission
Acoma Pueblo, New Mexico
Valencia Co.

HABS No. 36-NM-5

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. 36
Utah, Colorado and New Mexico

Historic American Buildings Survey
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31. Acoma

SAN ESTEBAN DEL REY MISSION
or
San Estevan de Acoma
Acoma Pueblo
Valencia County
New Mexico

Owner: Acoma Indians.

Date of Erection: Between 1629 and 1649 (see following pages); 1626
(index cards); 1629 (Hallenbeck¹).

Achitect:

Builder: Padre Juan Ramirez.

Present Condition: Fair.

Number of Stories: One.

Materials of Construction: Adobe and stone.

Other Existing Records: See text.¹

Additional Data: See following pages.

¹ See Hallenbeck, C., Spanish Missions of the Old Southwest, 34.

SAN ESTEBAN REY MISSION
Acoma Pueblo, New Mexico.

It has been assumed by several historians that the Acoma Mission, like those of most of the Mission Churches among the Pueblo Indians, was destroyed during the general Pueblo insurrection of 1680. We are fortunate in having the personal account of Don Diego De Vargas that he worshipped in the old church in the year 1693, which is but 64 years after the coming of Padre Juan Ramirez to Acoma. De Vargas' description tells us that it was a colossal structure with walls about a yard and a half in thickness. This is probably sufficient proof that the Acomans did not mutilate the structure between 1680 and 1693. Fray Geronimo Zarate Salmeron was the first Missionary to Acoma prior to 1629. It was not until the coming of Fray Juan Ramirez that a church was built. Fray Juan Ramirez during his stay of 20 years at Acoma from 1629 to 1649 built a great church and embellished it with many beautiful carvings.

Frederick W. Hodge tells us that the Church built by Padre Ramirez was destroyed and a new one erected during the Governorship of Pedro Rodriguez Cubero circa 1700. If this statement by Hodge is correct, it is very evident that if the Church was not destroyed

between the visit by De Vargas in 1693 and the time of Cubero (1700), it was badly mutilated. The bells bear an inscription dated 1710 which points that probably the Church was remodelled about this time.

The beautifully carved beams and doors varying in size can be found in dwellings throughout the entire Pueblo. These, from their workmanship, show that they are not of Indian construction. They are clearly the work of artisans with suitable tools for their work. It is very probable that the original Church was restored circa 1700 under the direction of Padre Antonio Miranda.

The subject of how many restorations and their exact periods and extent may never be known, however; that there have been several attempts at partial restoration or repairs is quite clear. These later attempts have been largely utilitarian. Though the timbers and other woodwork have been several times removed there is little doubt that the towers and main walls of the Church are the original built by Padre Juan Ramirez. Every stick of timber had to be laboriously carried to the top of the rock over a loose sandy trail and rock steps, in the hands or on the backs of men. Every grain of sand, which was of a poor quality when procured, had to be searched for, often not more than a seck or two in a pocket, and then had to be carried two miles in the pack saddle

of a burro. All water that was used had to be carried by women and men a distance of about three hundred yards and sometimes a full quarter mile over a difficult rocky foot trail. In this same manner every pound of dirt for adobes, mortar and plastering had to be carried up the Mesa from the plain below, on the backs of burros and Indians. With this lack of building material upon the mesa it is easy to see that, during the time the Christians were in disfavor at Acoma, the Church would be robbed of its available building materials.

The Church was renovated and restored circa 1810 under the direction of Don Jose Manuel Aragon, alcalde of Laguna and Acoma. Mr. W. S. Stallings of the Laboratory of Anthropology at Santa Fe, New Mexico finds that beams of this restoration and restorations by Aragon at Laguna cross date, by tree ring analysis. Mr. Stallings is at present making further studies with old timbers from the Church at Acoma. These studies should eventually definitely determine the date of erection of this Church.

About 1902 the Church was again restored. In 1927 the Society for the Restoration and Preservation of New Mexico Mission Churches undertook a rather extensive restoration program for the building. At this time they restored the walls and towers and put on a new composition roof over the church. Funds, however were not

2
available to complete the restoration of the Convento.
At this time the circular staircase was found in the
south tower of the Church and this very much mystified
the Indians as even the oldest in the tribe could not
recall such a stair.

Very valuable old photographs taken by Charles F.
Lummis circa 1890 are deposited with the Southwest
Museum in Los Angeles. The Laboratory of Anthropology at
Santa Fe, New Mexico has the Wittick collection of
photographs taken circa 1883. The State Museum at
Santa Fe and the Bureau of Ethnology in Washington
have later photographs.

References ; B. A. Reuter (Superintendent of
Construction in the 1927 restoration).
"Bancroft's Works Vol. XVII Arizona
and New Mexico", Hubert H. Bancroft.
"Leading Facts of New Mexican History"
R. E. Twitchell.
"Spanish Archives of New Mexico" R. E.
Twitchell.
"Old Santa Fe", R. E. Twitchell
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Southwest", E. R. Forrest
"Spanish Mission Churches of New Mexico",
L. Bradford Prince.

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